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How to Choose Good Day Care

Government
Publications



A Guide for Parents

Prepared by Day Care Branch,
Ministry of Community and Social Services

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Introduction

Are you looking for, or considering, out-of-home day care for your child or children? If so, do you know what is available? What *private-home* care offers? What to expect from a *nursery school* or *day care centre*? Of the possibility of combining private-home with day nursery care? For instance, mornings in a private-home and afternoons at a nursery school?

This booklet describes different kinds of day care. It offers what-to-look-for suggestions in choosing what is right for you and your children. Of course, other factors will also matter — such as what kinds of day care your neighbourhood offers, the age of your children and the hours you require care.

Whatever your choice, remember that the preschool years are vital 'growth' years. Children's development, both physical and emotional, will reflect their out-of-home experiences, and the quality of care. You will want your choice to be a beneficial experience for your children.

How do I locate Day Care?

- Phone your Municipal Office or the District Offices of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (listed on page 18).
- Check with agencies such as your Community Information Centre, the Y.M.C.A., your church or other service organizations in your community.
- Phone the public health nurse in your community.
- Check bulletin boards in laundromats and supermarkets.
- Check your local newspaper advertisements.

How do I select the best Day Care for my child?

- Phone the day care facilities you have located and select three or four which are convenient and meet your requirements (such as fees and age of children accepted).
- Arrange to visit the home or centre to ask questions.
- Time your visit. Go when the children there will be awake and active; not during a 'nap' period or at lunch.
- Take your child with you. This will give you some idea of how your child is accepted and responds to the surroundings.

Private-Home Day Care - What is it?



A *private-home* is generally a home in your neighbourhood, or convenient to your place of employment, where the children of one or more families are cared for during the day. Often the day care provider is a mother with children of her own at home.

In a private-home, your children are part of a 'family' atmosphere where they play with other children and often experience such outings as trips to the supermarket or park.

This type of day care, legally, can accommodate up to five children *only*, ensuring your child ample opportunity to relate to the day care provider.

Good private-home day care should provide more than a 'babysitting' service. Activities should include alternative quiet and active periods, and be flexible so that your child has a well-rounded schedule.

Although private-homes are not licensed, as are nursery schools and day care centres, they may in some areas be 'supervised'. 'Supervised' homes are those approved by the municipality or a community agency. They meet specific requirements such as safety standards and adequate play area. Parents of children in a 'supervised' private-home may apply for financial assistance towards the cost of day care, for further information see page 16.

What should I ask the Day Care Provider?

How does she feel about parents who work?

A person who believes that a mother should stay home to look after her own children may not make a good day care provider.

What is her philosophy on child care?

You will be happier if the day care provider and yourself share similar ideas about such items as cleanliness, play and discipline. If her outlook is considerably different from yours, it could confuse your child to have one set of standards applied during the day another, evenings and weekends.

Does she have training, experience?

Many private-home day care providers have taken child development courses, some may have a certificate in a child-care related field. Some have their own children and life-skills as a parent.

What arrangements has she for safety?

There are special dangers in the kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. For example, medicines and cleaning materials must be locked out of reach. A child should not be able to lock him or herself into the bathroom. The day care provider should be able to unlock the door from outside. Every lock should be out of children's reach.

What type of activities does she plan?

In general, variety and flexibility are signs of a good private-home day care program:

- Does the day care provider give each child sufficient personal attention? A story, some cuddling or small-talk is needed by a child *each day*.
- Do the children play amongst themselves? It is important for your child's development that he or she learn to interact with peers.
- Can the children choose activities from a variety of supplies? Are messy activities such as painting, glueing, paper-cutting and water-play also provided? It is important for your child to experience variety and creativity in his or her daily activities.
- Is there a good range of quiet and active activities each day? It is necessary for children to have quiet periods to 'unwind' as well as active periods to use up energy.
- How much television do the children watch? What types of programs? You'll feel happier if you and the day care provider agree on television viewing.

- Are there toys for infants? They need not be expensive commercial toys — homemade nesting cans of different sizes, and puff-balls made of tying net together can help keep an infant happy.
- Are there outdoor play facilities? Is there a yard or nearby park, perhaps a swing, sand box or climbing area? Will your child have some out-of-doors play during each day?

What should I tell the Day Care Provider about my child?

- Whether he or she does or does not sleep in the afternoon.
- The age and stage of development such as teething and toilet-training.
- The attention span — long or short?
- Any special problems such as allergies to food or animals.
- Whether he/she has or has not had previous day care.

When making your decision...

Consider which day care provider best suits your needs and will provide the most suitable day care and surroundings for your child. Take into account all the aspects listed, with emphasis perhaps on how your child and the day care provider responded to each other during the visit.

If possible, check with other parents whose children have been placed in the home for day care.

How can I establish a good working relationship?

Once you have made your selection, review with the day care provider what you expect from day care. For example, if you want your child to come home in a clean set of clothes,

tell the day care provider. Perhaps your child could have a set of clothes to change into for play during the day.

Put your agreements in writing.

Remember:

The fee: When is it paid and in what form (cheque or cash)? What other services does it cover or not cover (snacks, taking your child to the doctor)? Do you agree about charges for absences caused by illness or vacation? Is there an additional charge for late pick-up?

Pick-up: Arrange pick-up and delivery times. How much notice does the day care provider require if there is to be a late pick-up? Who is to pick up your child? What will be done when someone new is sent to pick up your child?

Insurance: Does the day care provider have insurance that would cover mishaps to your child?

Daily activities: Agree on arrangements for meals, rest time, indoor and outdoor play.

Emergency care: Use a form. Supply the day care provider with all the information about a doctor and how to reach him or her; how to reach yourself and friends or relatives during the day.

Health: General health of your child — allergies, previous illnesses (such as measles, chicken pox), immunization shots for scarlet fever, tetanus, etc.

Back-up person: Who would replace the day care provider in the event of an emergency?

Notice of Leaving: Make sure that you both agree about how much notice is required for withdrawing your child.

Work together. Discuss with the day care provider such things as foods your child doesn't like, fears and toilet-training. Talk over your child's day, — discuss any problems. Report to her any change in behaviour you notice. It is vital for your child's well being that there be a good exchange of communication between a parent and a day care provider.

Nursery Schools and Day care Centres - What are they?

Nursery Schools provide half-day programs which means they are not set up to meet the needs of most working parents. But you may wish to arrange a combination of private-home care and nursery school for your child.

Day Care Centres provide full-day programs and serve a noon meal.

In all other aspects, nursery schools and day care centres are the same — we refer to them collectively as “day nurseries”.



All day nurseries are licensed under The Day Nurseries Act of Ontario to provide day care for more than five children. They are required to meet basic standards for health and safety regulations, food, security and warm human interaction with both adults and children. They must also provide approved activities to stimulate your child's mental, physical and social development.

The supervisory staff members of a day nursery are required to have child guidance training. As soon as there are more than 4 children on the premises, there must be 2 adults.

Some day nurseries provide care for children from infant-age up. Some offer half-day, some full-day care, some provide after-school care for children up to the age of ten.

In a day nursery your child will be introduced to group activities as well as organized daily schedules. Most day nurseries divide the children into groups of no more than 25, so that your child has the opportunity to interact with his/her peers.



In making your choice between day nursery or private-home day care, it is important to consider your child's developmental stage. If he/she is over the age of two, you may prefer to combine a private-home with a day nursery on a half-day basis. Other considerations are convenience and the general availability of day care in your community.

What should I look for when I visit?

Once you have selected those day nurseries you wish to consider, arrange a time to visit, the morning is a good time. When you visit check the following:

The day-to-day program and type of activities:

Nature: Children caring for plants, feeding animals or spending time in the park are enjoying happy and healthy learning experiences.

Creative materials: Children painting with bright, thick colours, or oozing and shaping clay are expressing personal feelings, which will help develop their desire to read and write. Glueing small boxes, or scrap pieces of wood together and painting their 'sculptures', will help teach shape, balance and space (up, down, right and left).

Dramatic Play: Boys and girls both trying out roles, new experiences, and many varied types of activities, fulfilling their need to express their imagination. Do you see children with blocks, boards, rideable cars as ambulances or fire trucks, play money, costumes, dolls and toy animals, musical instruments?

Use of senses: Smelling, hearing, tasting and touching a wide variety of substances stimulates curiosity and learning.

Quiet Play: Looking at a book or listening to a story or music on a record player can be happy and personal experiences for children.

Do you feel that there is a wide variety of learning activities in the day nursery?

Equipment does not have to be complicated, glossy or expensive to create a happy learning atmosphere. Actually, commercial learning kits and games, expensive toys, colouring books or dittoed sheets may limit a child's imagination and learning.

Look at the children, Do you see...

- Children absorbed and happy in their play?
- Children turning to their teachers for comfort, help or information?
- Children exploring with materials and equipment?

A good program means no waiting for an activity to start, and an easy transition for the child from one activity to another.

Listen to the teachers

- Do they look directly at the children and use the same tone of voice with children as with adults? Children need to be treated with respect to gain self confidence.
- Do they respond to what a child has said? Each child needs to feel important within the group.
- What kinds of comments do the teachers make about a child's work? Children should be able to 'create' in their own way, express

their own feelings and the teacher should show appreciation for each child's efforts.

Observe the playground

You should see all of the following activities:

- Climbing, balancing and swinging. These help children's development and confidence.
- Riding tricycles and throwing balls. These encourage children to learn new skills.
- Dramatic play with boards, blocks and tires. These are activities which provide creative expression and social learning.
- Water and sand play. These are rich sensory experiences providing a valuable learning opportunity.

Teachers must ensure safety and provide loving and personal care to the children. Children need help when hurt, when feeling sad or isolated from the play of a group of children. The quality of play and relationships depends on the active planning and attention of the teachers.

What should I discuss with the teacher?

The Program

Does the day nursery have a good program organized for the children? There should be allowance made for extra outdoor play on nice days. How much television are the children permitted to watch? TV should not replace other activities. Schedules should include frequent field trips suited to the children's needs. Children living in cities may visit a nearby farm to see the animals, for example.

Does the program make provision for the integration of one or two handicapped children? Having a handicapped child in a normal setting is a good experience for both the normal and the handicapped child.

Discipline

What is the philosophy of the teacher regarding discipline? How is an aggressive child helped? How are social relationships developed and supported? What method of discipline is used when necessary? The philosophy of the day nursery regarding discipline should be acceptable to you.

Security

Do the staff members work well together? This helps the children to feel comfortable. Check with the teacher(s) who will be working with your child, try to find out how he/she feels about day-care work. Is he/she happy at this day nursery and planning to stay for quite awhile?

Parents' Program

Do you, the parent, have a 'say' in decisions made for your child? Do you feel welcome at the day nursery? Close home-day-nursery relations are beneficial to your child's development. Any situation that arises should be worked out in a co-operative manner with you. Are parent visits and conferences included in the day nursery's program?

Meals and Snacks

Ask to visit the kitchen and to look at the menus that are posted. The hot noon meal should be one that will appeal to children and should provide good nutrition. It should be well-balanced with meat, fish or eggs and vegetables and a raw vegetable as well. Do the children have regular snacks? What are they? You should feel that your child will be getting the nutrition necessary for his/her growth.

What Policies should I check?

Ask to see the current license under the Day Nurseries Act of Ontario. When there are conditions on the license or the renewal you should feel free to question the administrator about these.

You will need to know the day nursery's policies about the following:

Fees: When are they to be paid, weekly, monthly, and in what form?

Terms of Payment: Are there policies regarding days your child is sick, absent or on holidays?

Hours of Service: Pick-up and delivery times. What is the policy about late pick-up?

Responsibility for an Accident? What type of insurance does the day nursery have?

The Parent Program: Are there group meetings, regular interviews regarding your child's progress? Is there time for informal chats? Do they have a policy about your telephoning?

Transportation: If you are arranging with the day nursery for transportation, discuss the cost and length of the trip — more than half an hour is not desirable. Do they have a minimum age requirement for transportation service?

Withdrawal: How much notice do they require?

How can I prepare my child for day care?

When your child is of an age to understand, about 2 years or older, explain what day care is going to be like. "You are going to play with toys and eat lunch there."



Introduce your child to day care gradually. For example, the first day might be only a couple of hours with you staying at the day nursery or home; the second day a little longer, perhaps you can stay for awhile, leave and come back; the next day you might stay for only a few minutes. Each day your child can stay a little longer until you have reached the normal time period that he/she will be in day care.

After a good trial period of several weeks, your child may show you that this private-home or day nursery is not suitable. Signs of discontent may be loss of appetite or refusal to eat, fear of going to sleep, thumb-sucking bed-wetting, crying when you arrive at the day care door each morning, etc. If these signs are persistent you may have to make a change.

Can I get financial assistance?

You may be eligible for a financial subsidy towards the cost of your day care.

How much you receive towards the cost of day care will depend on:

- a) Your total earnings.
- b) Your total expenses.
- c) The number of children you have who require day care, their ages and the amount of day care each requires.

What are the requirements?

Your child must be receiving day care in:

- A licensed day nursery that has an agreement with your municipality, Indian Band, or the government of Ontario.
- A 'supervised' private-home. 'Supervised' private-homes are those approved by the municipality or a community agency. They must have not more than 5 children for day care, meet standards of health and safety, and provide assurance of continuing service for your children. They receive professional help in the understanding of child development.

Not all private-homes are 'supervised', and not all municipalities provide supervision. If you are planning to apply for a subsidy — check with your municipality to see if private-homes in your area are 'supervised' before placing your child in one. If there are no 'supervised' homes in your area, then you should place your child in a licensed day nursery.

If 'supervised' private-home day care is not yet a service in your community, inquiries about commencing a service should be directed to your local municipality.

There is no minimum age for children whose parents receive subsidy, the maximum is 9 years old.

Where do I get more information?

Phone or write to the Social Services department of your municipality, or contact the nearest office of the Ministry of Community and Social Services (see list on page 18).

Ministry District Offices

Southern Ontario

Barrie

Civic Square Tower
5th Floor
70 Collier St., Box 910
Barrie, Ont. L4M 4Y6
(705) 737-1311

Belleville

14 Bridge St. W.
Box 816
Belleville, Ont.
K8N 5B5
(613) 962-9562

Cornwall

132 Second Street E.
Box 1358
Cornwall, Ont.
K6H 5V4
(613) 932-3381

Hamilton

100 Main St. E.
39-40th Floors
Hamilton, Ont.
L8N 3X8
(416) 526-9300

Kingston

1055 Princess St.
Suite 103
Kingston, Ont.
K7L 5T3
(613) 544-6206

Lindsay

322 Kent St. W.
Box 7000
Lindsay, Ont.
K9V 5E5
(705) 324-6128

London

495 Richmond St.
London, Ont. N6A 5A9
(519) 438-5111

Metro Toronto

110 Eglinton Ave. W.
5th Floor
Toronto, Ont.
M4R 2C9
(416) 965-8449

Ottawa

2197 E. Riverside Dr.
Room 201
Ottawa, Ont. K1H 7X3
(613) 737-5520

St. Catharines

110 James St. Box 176
St. Catharines, Ont.
L2R 6S4
(416) 688-3022

Waterloo

75 King St. S.
Suite 501
Waterloo, Ontario
N2J 1P2
(519) 886-4700

Windsor

Ontario Gov't. Bldg.
250 Windsor Avenue
Windsor, Ont.
N9A 6V9
(519) 254-1651

York-Peel

55 City Centre Drive
3rd Floor, Univac Bldg.
Mississauga, Ont.
L5B 1M3
(416) 272-1972

Northern Ontario

Keewatin-Kenora

104 Government Rd.

Box 429

Keewatin, Ont.

P0X 1C0

(807) 547-2801

Kirkland Lake

8 Hudson Bay Ave.

Box 398

Kirkland Lake, Ont.

P2N 3J1

(705) 567-3391

North Bay

222 McIntyre St. W.

Suite 408

North Bay, Ont.

P1B 2Y8

(705) 474-3540

Sault Ste. Marie

123 March St.

Suite 304, Box 68

Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.

P6A 5L2

(705) 256-5666

Sudbury

127 Cedar St. 3rd floor

Sudbury, Ont. P3E 4S6

(705) 674-3151 Ext. 271

Thunder Bay

1200 Walsh St. W.

Thunder Bay, Ont.

P7E 4X4

(807) 475-1515



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